

IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

The ability to speak effectively in public is now **a matter of importance to almost every calling**. Times come to all of us when, like John Alden, **we must speak for ourselves. Great causes need defenders.**

To stand before an expectant audience, or before an expectant individual, with nothing to say or, which is as unfortunate, with much to say and without the ability to say it, is one of the most embarrassing situations in life.

A. The majority of public addresses are failures.

"I think things had better not be said at all, than said weakly."

How many addresses have you heard during the past six months that have held your interest, stirred your feelings, or roused your will? And if they have not accomplished one or all three of these things, they have to a degree done the opposite.

Dullness is eloquent—for the opposite side. A school teacher and a preacher are as much in duty bound to be interesting as a popular lecturer. **The more important a subject is, the more reason for giving it carrying power.**

B. Speaking in public is the most difficult of all the arts.

Cicero lamented: "There is nothing more rare among men than a perfect orator." In his *De Oratore*: "There is requisite to the orator the **acuteness** of the logician, the subtlety of the philosopher, the skilful harmony, almost, of the poet, the memory of a lawyer, the tragedian's voice, and the gesticulation

Perhaps it is the most difficult of all the arts because it is the most valuable. It is the **most difficult of the arts**, too, because there are **so many chances to fail**.

However, animated actors are often **dull** speakers. Some eminent literary men are almost as famous for their **failures** on the platform as for their successes with the pen. Harold Bell Wright, who has reaped a fortune from his books, **received**, it is said, almost a **starvation salary for his preaching**. Perhaps it was he who tells of

Logician's Acuteness = keen perception

Philosopher's Subtlety = ability to make fine distinctions

Poet's Harmony = combination of sounds considered pleasing to the ear

Lawyer's Memory = recall ability, extemporaneous, [prepared in advance but delivered without notes or text]

Tragedian's Voice (tr...j"dl...n)

= ability to express grief, sorrow, pain, disaster, tragedy, etc. with one's voice

Actor's Gesticulation (ju-st¹k"y...l³"sh...n) = able to make gestures especially while speaking, as for emphasis. --tr. To say or express by

the black exhorter who, after telling an acquaintance that he got only fifty dollars as a year's salary, and receiving the sympathetic response: "It is a disgrace to the church to pay you such a small salary!" answered: "Ah don't know, boss, did yo' evah hear me preach?" **The arts of saying and writing things, the same things, are different arts.**

Charming and inspiring conversationalists are sometimes worse than **dumb** before an audience. Both speakers and talkers have the gift of speech, but each is proverbially lacking in the other's art. They differ more widely than classical music and jazz or Gospel music. It is strange that the addition or subtraction of a certain number of hearers changes the art of vocal expression to a foreign field! Who would want to hear on the platform Socrates or Dr. Samuel Johnson,

"Of the three places, where we hear most public speaking and reading—our courts of law, our theatres, and our churches—the place where we hear the best elocution is the first, and the place where we hear the worst elocution is the last."

the world's two most famous conversationalists?

Unfortunately, the majority of men that have chosen speaking in public as their profession are lamentably poor speakers. Many ministers are failures in the pulpit. The sheep do not want to hear

their voice. Their members bring to church more religious zeal than they carry away. If it were not for the rich content of the Gospel that they preach, they would not be worth listening to. It is sad that a hearer has to force himself to listen to what should be the breath of heaven to him; and that the good seed finds its chief impediment in the sower.

An eloquent young preacher came to the study of the Reverend F. F. Emerson, a thoughtful, but dull speaker, and said to him: "If I had your sermons, or you my delivery, we could carry all before us!" During Mr. Emerson's next summer vacation, some one broke into his house and stole his sermons. [I am not offering this incident as a solution of the difficulty.]

It's often remarked that speaking in public has had its day: with the host of high class periodicals and books that are flooding the press, we do not need the platform any longer. Even the vast amounts of information available to us through the Internet, World Wide Web, gives some the impression that public address is no longer necessary. BUT, The objection is shallow. Good speaking has many elements of superiority over good books. It makes thought alive; its impression goes deeper; its meaning is dearer through the concrete medium of gesticulation; the speaker's personal magnetism is a vital influence; and warmth of social feeling is to be found only in a congregation of one's fellows.

A series of addresses on *The Fallacy of Well Known Proverbs*: Perhaps the most absurd of such trite proverbs is: "Talk is cheap." No talk could well be cheaper than that saying.

C. Talk is the mightiest force in the world.

Herein lies education. It teach others; it teaches the talker most of all. **An idea is never really our own until we have imparted it to another.** To keep an idea give it away. The Declaration of Independence is talk. The speech of Lincoln at the battlefield of Gettysburg, despite his modest declaration to the contrary, has become more famous than the battle itself. Talk has made the reputation of the Tower of Babel. Talk has made the financial success of the telephone, the phonograph, the radio. The Sermon on the Mount was talk. So were the Ten Commandments—though in that case actions speak louder than words. What is a marriage proposal but talk? If "talk is cheap," how explain the influence of propaganda? Abraham Lincoln, striking off the iron shackles of slavery, replaced them with the golden fetters of public opinion:

"Public sentiment is everything: with public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts

statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed."

When John the mystic evangelist sought a metaphor with which to describe the relation that the Messiah bore to the Father, he called Him the Word of God. A luminous phrase! A word is the expression of the inner life. Through words, as across a bridge, heart travels to heart.

D. Oratory has taken/held a place of prominence in the past century that it had never known before.

Today, when books, periodical literature, and the World Wide Web have an unprecedentedly wide circulation, oratory still holds a place of prominence that it had never known before. Every book and lecture on business efficiency gives speakability prime emphasis. Shelf after shelf in the public library is devoted to it. It holds an increasingly conspicuous place in the curricula of colleges and schools. Advertisements in the papers announce extension courses and night schools where business clerks and members of social clubs shall have opportunity for the study and practice of this the highest of the arts. It is even being taught by mail.

Writing copy: talking on paper, or in print.

Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* deals with one's speaking ability.

It is often said that the pulpit is the minister's throne. While executive management and pastoral work are of vital importance, yet every school of theology places **preaching ability as supreme among ministerial gifts**. Churches are looking for **preaching pastors**. Candidates for the pastorate are not asked to set up a sample organization, but to preach sample sermons, much as one may regret this unfair and disproportionate method of rating ability. So difficult to find are arresting and convincing speakers, that our great city churches frequently call to their pulpits men of other denominational affiliations, and employ assistants to take charge of administration and pastoral service. More and more, even if several churches have to combine to bring it about, are congregations coming to see that men of special gifts should be kept free to exercise them, unhampered by details that associates can perform.

Ninety to a hundred years ago, not only was debating not taught in the classroom, but there were no intercollegiate debates, no school or college debating societies. Public forums were unknown. The lawyer had to learn in the law school to defend a case; others had to depend on their native/natural talent for repartee¹ in an emergency. The Oxford Union in England has shown American students the value of the public debate. For, in a very real sense, every public utterance is

¹ **rep-ar-tee** (rɪp"ˌɑːr-ti" , -tɪ" , -är-) *n.* **1.** A swift, witty reply. **2.** Conversation marked by the exchange of witty retorts.

a debate, the fact that the opponents in the audience have no chance to “come back” making them the more dangerous, and difficult to convince. That is why Henry Ward Beecher encouraged his church members to express opposition in his prayer meetings.

Every speech is a contest between speaker and audience.

The high place of public speech is proved also by the extraordinary fame of great masters on the platform. When Moody and Sankey proposed to hire the circus tent for evangelistic services, the circus proprietors laughed at them. But the vast throngs swelling in and looking for seats told its own story. Police were compelled to club the crowds that threatened to wreck the opening passageways by their furious zeal to get in. At the services of Billy Sunday, auditors climbed up among the rafters, at risk of life and limb, to hear him speak. Evangelist Billy Graham filled Madison Square Garden night after night for weeks on end, and his words drew men and women irresistibly forward. The William Jennings Bryan² and others have had similar experiences. Political opponents who came to hiss have ended by throwing their hats in the air, howling approval of sentiments that they knew they did not believe. This Commoner, who had formed the habit of running in vain for the presidency, dominated the views of his party as soon as he rose to speak.

E. Such knowledge is important background for the serious student of speech.

The key to success on the platform will not be found in the pockets of the punctilious³ observer of set rules for speaking in public. Of course, for the serious student of speech such knowledge is important background, but in trying to remember them, we should fail to observe them. The very effort is distracting from the purpose in view. One professor of public speaking at a theological seminary had drawn

² **Bryan, William Jennings.** Called “the Great Commoner” or “**the Boy Orator of the Platte.**” 1860-1925. American lawyer and politician who campaigned unsuccessfully for the presidency in 1896, 1900, and 1908. He is famous for his impassioned “Cross of Gold” speech advocating free silver (1896) and for his defense of fundamentalism in the Scopes trial (1925).

³ **punc·til·i·ous** (p³/₄ngk-tl“ŋ-...s) *adj.* **1.** Strictly attentive to minute details of form in action or conduct. See Synonyms at **meticulous.** **2.** Precise; scrupulous. --**punc·til“i·ous·ly** *adv.* --**punc·til“i·ous·ness** *n.*

on the blackboard a scientific diagram of the human throat, showing the physiographic location of the organs of speech. Suppose that while you were delivering an address to a thousand high school students on *Fair Play*, you were to be asking yourself: **“Did that tone come from my trachea, esophagus, or diaphragm?” where, oh where, would you find your audience when you came to?** It is of importance to study the proper use and register of your voice as the medium of expression, as we shall do, later, but the process of steel-making does not interest the surgeon as he uses the knife. The rules of speaking, like those of all the arts, must be so assiduously⁴ practiced in private that they become the unconscious guides of public performance.

Speaking is self-expression. It is not a mere figure of speech to say that a speaker “expresses himself” well or ill. When we hear that such and such was said, we ask at once: “Who said it?” Was it this one or that one? **It is for this reason that the student of public speech lays his emphasis on the speaker, the self that lies back of all that is to be spoken. The less a man knows, the more he talks and the less he says.** “The cannon must be larger than the shot it puts.” That is why **a familiar thought when spoken by a strong man is given new meaning.** It is stamped with his personality. Almost anything is striking, if uttered by the right lips. Though the world is too old for original thoughts, **every thought strained through an original mind becomes original.** Such original thoughts, uttered in deep earnest and under the discipline of study and practice, kindle response and action in those who hear them. **The seeming ease of the artist is the hard won result of long practice.**

While there is a wide variety of speeches to which the gift of speaking in public is put, yet the laws of the game, the principles that make for success or failure, are similar. That is why books and courses of study in this field have so live an appeal. **Every speech is a contest between the speaker and his audience.** When he mounts the pulpit or the soap-box, he throws down the gauntlet. There may be no consciousness of competition on either side, but it is there. As in the case of an auctioneer and the buyers, so in every assembly either the rostrum or the benches will get the victory. The result is like that of the baseball series: one day the “Yankees” win,

⁴ **as·sid·u·ous** (...-sɪj">-...s) *adj.* **1.** Constant in application or attention; diligent: *an assiduous worker who strove for perfection.* See Synonyms at **busy**. **2.** Unceasing; persistent: *assiduous research.* [From Latin *assiduus*, from *assidēre*, to attend to : *ad-*, *ad-* + *sedēre*, to sit; see **sed-** below.] **--as·sid“u·ous·ly** *adv.* **--as·sid“u·ous·ness** *n.*

the next day the "Indians." The speaker has warmed the cold, instructed the ignorant, saved the sinner, halted the speeder, interested the stupid; or else he has slunk from his elevation in defeat with the consciousness that the load was too heavy for him to lift. **Is there any humiliation on earth equal to that of sneaking, like a whipped cur, from the arena of public speech, feeling that the loftiest, purest efforts of your life have been thrown back in your face?** "Is there any hell," cried poor Keats, "fiercer than the failure in a great object?" But on the other side: **Is there on the earth any exaltation of spirit equal to that of having "swept the boards"? Whether in thunders of applause, or in the silence of tear-stained faces,** the winner in this contest has won such a reward as few situations have the wealth to offer.

Manifold as are the causes of defeat to a speaker, as many are the reasons for success in his calling. ¹**He must speak well, first, to pay the debt he owes his audience.** A public office is a public trust. Every calling is a mortgage held by the public. St. Paul, entering upon his calling, acknowledges: "I am a debtor, both to Greeks and to barbarians; as far as in me lies, I am a debtor." In taking the platform, you have acknowledged your debt. Expectant faces must not be disappointed.

²**You must speak well, to uphold the reputation of your profession.** The chief argument for or against any occupation is the men that occupy themselves with it. **Success is contagious: and every man that succeeds is a living invitation to choose his way of life.** How many telephone operators Alexander Graham Bell made! How many aviators Charles Lindbergh! In Webster's courtroom every one wanted to be a lawyer; in Beecher's congregation a minister. Who but pulpiteers are to be blamed for the phrase, "dry as preaching"? When a man wants to give stimulating advice to a friend, why does he begin by saying: "Now, I'm not going to preach to you"? He ought to wish he could. Why do television and movie-makers sometimes make the Protestant minister ridiculous? It is because some ministers whom the filmmakers and actors have heard made their profession ridiculous. **When a speaker addresses an audience who is accustomed to listening to a platform king, he has their attention from the start: and when he follows "a mere discharger of words," he must fight for attention in every word he speaks.** His congregations are right: how else can they judge of a profession than by its representatives? By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. **Commend your calling by your practice.**

³**Your future depends on your success.** You must earn your salary, or lose it. The same thing is true of your reputation. To speak

well, is to win invitations to speak; and each invitation accepted increases the ability to speak well. Dividends at interest pay dividends: to him that hath shall be given.

Speaking well has cultural value for the speaker. Senator Beveridge, after defining oratory as one of the fine arts, adds: "Art is the highest function of the mind and soul of man." To appreciate art to the full, one must become an artist. The alert pursuit of a high vocation lifts every faculty of the mind. **Everything that one does well brings self-criticism of everything else one is doing.** "The better is the enemy of the best." On many a grave, if the truth were told, would be found written the **epitaph: "Too easily satisfied."** **Every one can do better than he thinks.** There is a sleeping giant within that needs only the noise of serviceable industry to awaken it. There are men of force on the platform today who, when they began, had everything against them: a thin voice, clumsy mannerisms, and a hangdog spirit.

To defend exalted themes in resistless speech, is to hold human history in your hands. Divinity students laughed at one of their classmates who refused to accept any recreational invitation for the afternoon before he was to preach: "The destiny of men may hang on that address," he declared. His great New York pastorate proved him right. The listener's life is what the speaker makes it. "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." When Rockefeller was brought forward for church membership as a boy, it is said, a prominent church official objected: "Well, I suppose there is no harm in letting such children come into the church, if they want to; but of course they can be of no financial value." **The speaker draws his bow at a venture: how little he knows the mark he hits!** There were two hundred additions to a church from a series of services. A similar series was held contemporaneously elsewhere, with only one convert. The names of the two hundred have all been forgotten. The single convert was David Livingstone. Earnest speech is gifted with parenthood. The late Sylvester Home boldly declared: "The appearance of a true preacher is the greatest gift that any nation can have." He points the path to character.

The truth is on trial, and we are the witnesses. What verdict will the jury render?